

## PEOPLE COMMITTEE

(Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority)

26 April 2023

### Present:

Councillors Hannaford (Chair), Best, Clayton (Vice-Chair), Kendall, Peart, Thomas and Trail BEM

### In attendance:

Councillors Coles (in person) and Cook-Woodman (via Teams)

\* **PC/22/15**

### **Minutes**

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2023 be signed as a correct record.

\* **PC/22/16**

### **Application for Retirement/Re-employment**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Finance, People & Estates (PC/23/3) setting out an application received in accordance with the Authority's approved Pay Policy Statement for 2023-24 for retirement and re-employment.

**RESOLVED** that the application for retirement and re-employment set out at paragraph 2.3 of report PC/23/3 be approved.

\* **PC/22/17**

### **Performance Monitoring Report 2022-23: Quarter 4**

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of Finance, People & Estates (PC/23/4) detailing performance as at Quarter 3 of 2022-23 against those Key Performance Indicators agreed by the Committee for measuring progress against the following three strategic priorities as approved by the Authority:

- 3(a). Ensure that the workforce is highly trained and has the capability and capacity to deliver services professionally, safely and effectively;
- 3(b). Increase the diversity of the workforce to better reflect the communities we serve, promoting inclusion and developing strong and effective leaders who ensure that we have a fair place to work where our organisational values are a lived experience; and
- 3(c). Recognise and maximise the value of all employees, particularly the commitment of on-call firefighters, improving recruitment and retention.

In particular, the report provided information on performance against each of the following key measures:

- operational core competence skills (beathing apparatus; incident command; water rescue; safety when working at heights or in confined spaces; maritime; driving; and casualty care);
- health and safety (accidents [including near misses]; personal injuries; vehicle incidents (together with the correlation to appliance mobilisation) and reporting against the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR));
- sickness and absence (including mental health) for wholetime, on-call, support, Control and casual staff, by type of sickness and details of the health and wellbeing support offered by the Service. The report also provided comparisons with national fire service data and featured benchmarking for sickness absence against comparable, neighbouring fire and rescue services;
- fitness testing (including support offered for red and amber groups) and a review of testing to explore a more inclusive, role-related functional fitness test for operational staff;
- diversity, with a particular emphasis on the work being undertaken on retention and promoting inclusion by developing strong leadership living the Service's values ;
- promoting inclusion, developing strong leaders, living Service values and being a fair place to work;
- strategic workforce planning including details of staff turnover in all categories of the workforce; and
- employee engagement.

The Committee noted and welcomed the point that there were no areas below the 90% minimum threshold on performance against operational core competency skills albeit that performance against Working at Height and in Confined Spaces was at amber (93% overall). This was due to the legacy of recording against two different systems, a matter which could not be resolved until 2025 when the existing legacy position would expire and requalification would be required. It was requested, however, that the term "no action required" in the column headed "Impact and action taken" under paragraph 2.6 of the report be replaced in future as this could be perceived to mean that the Service was not striving to achieve more. The Area Manager (Training and Development) responded that this would be replaced by a commentary on the mitigating action taken in future. It was also confirmed that pilots were being undertaken in conjunction with the Estates Department for the local delivery of training to staff.

Reference was made to performance on health and safety issues which was showing:

- a slight decrease in the rolling 12 month trend on accidents in 2022/23 overall albeit with an increase from 55 to 68 accidents in quarter 4 (January to March 2023);
- there were 21 near misses in quarter 4 of 2022-23, a 50% increase (7 events) on the previous quarter but this was welcomed as it enabled organisational learning to achieve improvements in the longer term;
- personal injuries remained low generally with the rolling 12-month trend showing a reduction from a high of 11 in May 2022 to 5 in February 2023;
- vehicle incidents increased in quarter 4 of 2022-23 by one incident from 36 to 37 although the decreasing long-term trend remained;
- RIDDOR had remained with a decreasing trend over the last five years. All dangerous occurrence events were investigated with the lessons learned communicated to staff.

The average number of days/shifts lost due to sickness absence had increased slightly from 8.37 in 2021-22 to 9.4 in 2022-23 (April 2022 to February 2023). The average number of days sickness absence over the rolling 12 months from March 2022 to February 2023 showed a more stable trend in both long and short term certificated absence since July 2022, although short term uncertificated absence had increased from 1.5 days on average to 2.8 days. 53% of all short term absence was due to colds/flu with musculoskeletal coming in second and mental health third. Both musculoskeletal and mental health issues lead to longer periods of absence than colds/flu, however.

The Committee extended its appreciation for the performance on fitness testing which was at 99% now with 1549 out of 1560 staff having passed. It was noted that every effort was made with the 11 individuals who had not passed to bring them up to the required fitness standard. It was further noted that work was being undertaken in conjunction with the National Fire Chiefs' Council to review the fitness standards to ensure a more inclusive approach in future.

The annual measures for Diversity showed there had been a slight decrease in the number of female staff employed from 14.6 % in 2021 to 14.4% in 2022. There had, however, been an increase in the percentage of ethnic minority staff employed from 2.8% to 3.5% in 2022. The figures for Diversity were set out in more depth in a separate report to the Committee (Minute PC/22/18 below refers). The Chair expressed concern that the number of women and LGBT and ethnic minority staff within the Service was still too low. The Diversity Manager undertook to report in more depth at the next meeting on the actions being taken to improve performance in this area.

The Service had implemented a Strategic Workforce Planning Group to look more closely at overall establishment levels month on month. The Group received regular updates on sickness absence data, recruitment and selection processes and development programmes underway in order to keep informed and be proactive in identifying trends at an earlier stage going forwards. The data showed that in 2022-23, the leavers were split with:

- 94 On Call leavers,
- 67 support staff; and
- 36 wholetime.

There were also:

- 93 On Call starters;
- 36 support staff starters; and
- 23 wholetime starters.

The figures continued to indicate that the Service was losing more staff than it was recruiting but noted that there had been a recruitment freeze instigated during part of the 2022-23 financial year. A new Human Resources Systems project was underway which would provide greater visibility of people management data including structure, performance and sickness absence.

It was also noted that a new, annual staff survey had been launched recently which it was envisaged would provide an updated picture, the results of which would be reported to a future meeting of the Committee.

\* **PC/22/18** **Workforce & Recruitment Diversity Report 2022**

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of Finance, People & Estates (PC/23/5) on Workforce & Diversity Recruitment in 2022 submitted in accordance with the provisions set out within Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010. This Act provided for public bodies to publish equality information pertaining to the makeup of its workforce on an annual basis and covering all the protected characteristics including gender, disability, ethnic group, religion and sexual orientation.

The key findings identified in the report were:

- Female representation in operational roles (On Call and Wholetime) remained low at 6.5% and below the national fire sector benchmark of 8%;
- There was a reduction in female starters in the On Call which, at 8, was 2 less than in 2021 although the overall number of operational posts occupied by women increased to the highest ever at 110;
- There had been a decrease in the number of applications submitted by women for operational roles;
- The percentage of applicants from minority ethnic backgrounds was 7.8% which was close to the figure of 8% representation in the community;

- Representation from people from minority ethnic backgrounds in the Service was 0.8% which was four times lower than in the communities of Devon and Somerset; and
- External application rates from Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender (LGBT) people was 2.5% which was lower than the community average of 3.7%.

There was concern expressed in respect of some of the terminology used in this report such as “People of Colour”. It was explained that the staff group engaged with in the Service had requested the use of this terminology specifically. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer suggested that the Chair should meet with the staff engagement group to hear their views on this matter at first hand.

Reference was made to the need to engage more with community groups such as at local PRIDE events, fairs, schools and colleges and so on to raise awareness of the work of the Service and to promote the opportunities that may be available, albeit that recruitment was paused presently due to the budgetary restraints. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer undertook to work closely with the Human Resources and Community Safety teams to maximise opportunities for engagement with local communities.

\* **PC/22/19** **People & Culture Update**

The Committee received for information a report of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (PC/23/6) setting out details of the work that had been undertaken within Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service to address the Cause of Concern on culture and specifically how staff treat one another as raised within the report of His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary & Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS). An action plan had been developed to address the cultural improvements needed (also subject to a separate report elsewhere on the agenda for this meeting). This also took into account the outcome of national recommendations made within the London Fire Brigade cultural review, the Metropolitan Police cultural review and the spotlight report published recently by HMICFRS.

The action taken to achieve cultural change to date included (amongst others):

- The establishment of a sponsorship programme “Our Time” in collaboration with Devon & Cornwall Constabulary, Dorset Constabulary and Devon County Council to remove barriers to increasing diversity and inclusion in the workforce, particularly in relation to progression for female staff;
- Membership of the Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion which provided guidance and support around the development of policies together with facilitating benchmarking through an assessment called TIDE. In 2018/19 the Service has achieved the Bronze Award, improving to the Silver Award in 2019/20 which has been maintained to 2022/23;

- The introduction of an intervention programme “Safe To” to foster psychological safety within the organisation so that staff feel included, safe to learn and safe to challenge;
- Implementation of a Respect and Fairness Toolkit to provide staff with options and the resources needed to deal with experiencing, witnessing or managing unwanted behaviour; and
- The implementation of the Core Code of Ethics with training to back this up.

The Committee was also apprised of the actions being taken directly to address the Cause of Concern highlighted by HMICFRS. 23 actions were established and the progress made included:

- The provision of two, new eLearning packages on Diversity and Inclusion, one for all staff and one for managers;
- The delivery of Values, Behaviours and Ethics training to all staff (with a 90% take up to date);
- The removal of all inappropriate material from Service premises; the development of a new Personal, Performance Development tool featuring mandatory questions on bullying, harassment and discrimination; and
- The communication of the general outcomes of discipline cases to staff for awareness.

The Committee endorsed and welcomed the progress made against the recommendations made by HMICFRS as set out within the report but asked for a red, amber, green status to be added to future reports to facilitate gauging progress.

***NB. Minute PC/23/20 below also refers.***

\* PC/22/20

**His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary & Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Cause of Concern and Areas for Improvement Action Plan**

The Committee received for information a report of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (PC/23/7) outlining progress to date against the Action Plans developed to address both the Cause of Concern and Areas for Improvement identified following the most recent Service inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

In terms of the Cause of Concern and 14 Areas for Improvement identified by HMICFRS, 8 had been linked to the People Committee for tracking.

Seven of the actions within the Cause of Concern Action Plan were recorded currently as “In Progress – Off Track” due to:

- 01a.03: 90% of individuals had completed the training presentation on values, behaviours and ethics. A decision needed to be made on the target completion level for all staff across the Service;

- 01a.06: This action had been delayed due to problems with the current PPD system and therefore was off track as its target completion date (28/02/2023) had now passed;
- 01a.07: This action had been changed to now include three charters instead of the four originally planned. These will be trainer/ trainee charter, customer service charter (external) and an internal charter between staff. Work is already being progressed on the trainee/ trainer and external charters, the internal charter will now be developed;
- 01a.08/ 01b.01: The first core brief on culture will form part of the next blog by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer and additional training will be delivered through Innovation Central. This action has been marked as off track as its target completion date (31/12/2022) has now passed.
- 01b.08: Support has been given from the Organisational Development department to incorporate the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian into an existing role. Due to the approach taken to establish this role, through consultation with a working group, the action has taken longer than expected to complete. The Service's Executive Board had agreed that the action will remain as 'Off Track' until the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian had been established; and
- 1b.11: This action had been completed but there was an issue with the policy management system and getting the policy approved. This action had been marked as off track as its target completion date (28/02/2023) had now passed.

It was noted that one action within the Areas for Improvement action plan was currently recorded as 'In Progress – Off Track'. This was because action 01a.06 'PPDs to be completed in line with policy and recorded on Workbench' (outlined as off track in the Cause of Concern update above) was also linked to HMI-3.4-202214 (PDR Process), which was now also showing as off track. One Area for Improvement, HMI-3.4-202215 (High Potential Staff) had been paused due to dependencies on the Area for Improvement around the selection and promotions process (HMI-3.4-202213).

***NB. Minute PC/23/19 above also refers.***

**\*DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**

The Meeting started at 10.00 am and finished at 12.20 pm

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